DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 476 113 UD 035 647

TITLE	School Success Tool-Kit: Tools To Help You Get Involved in Your Child's Education.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	49p.; Produced by the People for the American Way Foundation.
AVAILABLE FROM	People for the American Way Foundation, 2000 M Street, N.W., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036. Tel: 202-467-4999; Web site: http://www.schoolsuccessinfo.org.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Cultural Differences; Discipline; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Financial Support; Learning Disabilities; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Socioeconomic Status; Special Education; Standardized Tests; Student Rights; Undocumented Immigrants

ABSTRACT

This took kit is part of a national campaign to help parents get more closely involved in their children's education. The campaign, "Success in School Equals Success in Life," asserts that all parents have the right to free, high quality education for their children regardless of race, gender, national origin, or disability status; all parents have the right to be involved in their children's education; all parents have a right to public schools that are properly maintained and adequately funded; all parents have a right to be informed of school policies; all parents have the right to send their children to safe, respectful public schools; and all parents have the right to know about any problems or challenges their children are facing and how they can work with the school to help their children succeed. The booklet presents information on visiting the child's school during school visits or open houses; dealing with disciplinary issues; the child and standardized tests; overcoming social, economic, and cultural barriers; school funding (a key to quality education); learning disabilities and special education; undocumented students and their rights; where to turn with concerns; and other resources. Questions to ask and/or issues to consider are presented for each section. (SM)

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School Success Tool-Kit

TOOLS TO HELP YOU GET INVOLVED IN YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION

success in school = success of life

www.schoolsuccessinfo.org

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How you can get involved, one step at a time.

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Important Phone Numbers

Teacher

(____) _____-_____

School

(____) _____-_____

Local NAACP Chapter

(____) _____-_____

Superintendent's office

(____) _____-_____

School Board/School Board member

(____) _____-_____

State Department of Education

(____) _____-_____

People For the American Way Foundation: (202) 467-4999

NAACP: (877) NAACP-98

Office for Civil Rights:
(800) 421-3481
(TDD: (877) 521-2172)

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success in school = success in life

introduction

This booklet is part of a national campaign to help parents get more closely involved in their children's education. This campaign, "Success in School Equals Success in Life," is co-sponsored by the People For the American Way Foundation, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Advertising Council and Eastman Kodak Company. For more information, those with Internet access can visit: www.schoolsuccessinfo.org. We have also included a comprehensive list of resources. Look for the A+ throughout this tool-kit to learn more about the topic.

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All parents have a right to be involved in their children's education...

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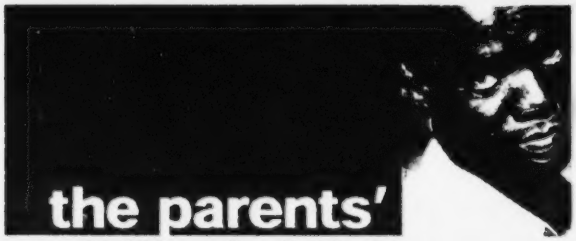

the parents' bill of rights

1. All parents have the right to free, high-quality education for their children regardless of their children's race, gender, national origin, age, or disability status.

2. All parents have a right to be involved in their children's education, participate in school meetings, be heard by teachers and school staff, and receive prompt responses to their questions or concerns.

3. All parents have a right to public schools that are properly maintained and adequately funded to provide a high-quality education for all children

4. All parents have a right to be informed of school policies, teaching strategies, and other programs that will affect their children's learning, and to receive this information in terms that they can understand.

5. All parents have a right to send their children to public schools that are safe places to learn, respectful of all children, and enforcing disciplinary policies fairly and consistently.

6. All parents have a right to know about any problems or unique challenges that their children are facing and how they can work with school staff to help their children succeed.

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visiting your child's school

SCHOOL VISITS OR OPEN HOUSES

Attending a school event shows teachers and school officials that your child's education is important to you and that you value the work they do. It's also a chance to learn more about how the school operates.

Questions to ask yourself:

Physical condition of the school:

- Is the school neat and orderly, and are hallways and stairs free of debris?
- Are there enough trash containers, both inside and outside of the school?
- Is there graffiti on the exterior walls or sidewalks in front of the school?
- Are the restrooms clean and functioning properly?

The classroom:

- Does the teacher display students' papers, art, or other work on bulletin boards or other areas?

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- Are copies of lunch menus or announcements of athletic and other school events posted in the classroom or in other areas of the school?
- How are the desks arranged and where does your child sit? (This can help you understand what needs or distractions your child might encounter.)

The school library:

- Is the library a quiet yet active place for learning?
- Does it appear to have a wide variety of books and learning materials?
- Are books and reference materials up-to-date?

The playground:

- Is there enough playground equipment?
- Is the equipment safe and in working condition?
- Is it adequately supervised by teachers or other monitors during recess time?

Your child:

- Does your child like his/her school?
- Does your child feel challenged and motivated?
- Does your child understand and follow school rules?

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The teachers:

- Do they appear happy and motivated?
- How do they interact with the students?
- What are their classroom expectations and disciplinary procedures?
- How many of the teachers are certified in their subject area?

Other staff:

- Are they familiar with school procedures?
- Do they function as a team?

Questions to ask others:

For your child's teacher:

- How many students are in my child's class?
- Are you pleased with my child's progress?
- What do you expect my child to know or understand by the end of the school year?
- Does my child get along with the other students?
- Do you have an instructional aide or other assistant assigned to help you?
- What can I do at home to reinforce the skills that you're working on in the classroom?

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- When can I expect report cards or progress reports to be sent home?
- Are any class field trips planned?

For the school's principal:

- Does the school offer special programs for music, art, athletics, and drama in which my child can participate?
- What academic clubs or service organizations can students join?

For a school district official or school board member:

- How much money does the school district invest in parent involvement programs?
- Has the district adopted a written policy on parent involvement? Can I get a copy of the policy?
- Do you have specific suggestions for how a busy parent can get more involved?

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SCHOOL CONFERENCES

When you request or are asked to attend a conference with your child's teacher or principal, you will probably have a lot to talk about, but a limited amount of time. The better prepared you are, the more productive the meeting will be. In your discussions, be open and honest. The more a teacher knows about your child or family issues that affect your child, the better he or she will be able to help your child.

Questions to ask during the conference:

- What are my child's best and worst subjects?
- What are my child's weaknesses and strengths?
- Is my child working to the best of his/her ability? If not, how can we (teacher and parent) work together to ensure that my child does so in the future?
- Does my child participate in class discussions and activities?
- Have you noticed any changes in my child's behavior that I should be concerned about?
- Has my child missed any classes other than those for which he had an excuse from me?

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- What kind of tests will my child be taking this year? How should my child prepare for these tests and what can I do to help?
- Do you have a schedule of PTA meetings, and other open house nights throughout the year? How do I find out what was covered in these meetings if I can't make them for any reason?
- Are you planning to assign any big projects that my child will need to complete during the remainder of this school year? How can I help him succeed?
- How well does my child get along with his peers, teachers, and authority figures?

What to take away from the conference:

- Make sure you and the teacher have discussed specific actions that you and/or others can take to help your child perform better in school.
- Be sure all your questions have been answered. If you were unable to reach an agreement or understanding with your child's teacher, talk with a principal or another administrator.

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GETTING READY FOR THE CONFERENCE: A QUICK CHECKLIST

It's natural to feel a bit nervous about a parent-teacher conference. Here is a checklist to help you prepare for the conference:

- ✓ Explain to your child that the meeting's purpose is to help you understand any difficulties he/she is having and how to address them.
- ✓ Talk with your child about his/her strengths and weaknesses in the class.
- ✓ Ask your child what he/she would change about school and why.
- ✓ Find out if your child is having problems with a teacher, a specific assignment, a classmate, etc.
- ✓ Ask your child what he/she would like you to ask the teacher.
- ✓ Make a list of any issues your child is facing (such as health problems) that may be affecting his/her schoolwork.
- ✓ Be prepared to inform the teacher of your child's at-home study habits.
- ✓ Take a written list of questions with you.
- ✓ Bring a notepad and pen to the conference. Taking notes helps you remember important details and provides a record of the meeting.

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- ✓ Don't focus on only the negative things that you hear. The teacher should be able to point to some of your child's unique skills and accomplishments. If the teacher hasn't, you should feel comfortable asking about this.
- ✓ Direct the discussion toward solutions. It's important that you leave the conference with one or more options for addressing the situation.
- ✓ Fight the urge to argue with the teacher, even if you disagree with what he or she has said about your child's behavior. Focusing first on areas where you agree can ease the tension.
- ✓ Be your child's advocate. If you feel that the school or a teacher is not meeting your child's needs, consider all of your options and search for a solution. (A+)
- ✓ Provide the teacher with your contact information. Taking this proactive step lets both the teacher and your child know that you will be immediately involved when positive or negative situations arise.
- ✓ Ask the teacher to outline specific and general goals for the marking period, semester and school year. Then, monitor and assess your child's progress with practical home assignments. This puts you in a good position to identify learning problems early on.
- ✓ Don't be afraid to ask the teacher to clarify anything you don't understand. Not only will it arm you with all the information you need, but it will also make future meetings less intimidating and more useful.

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dealing with disciplinary issues

Building a good relationship with your child's teacher and school is one of the best ways to identify and respond to any behavioral issues. Children's behavior at school is often linked closely to their academic progress. Children who feel bored, confused or overwhelmed by schoolwork sometimes act out by misbehaving.

Research has shown that African-American and Latino students are often more likely to be suspended or expelled from school. This makes it critical for parents to be familiar with your school's disciplinary policies and to take concrete steps to address concerns as soon as they arise.

WHAT PARENTS CAN DO AT THE START OF THE SCHOOL YEAR

- Tell your child that you expect them to work hard in school and treat their teacher(s), school staff, and other students with respect.
- Get a copy of the school's student handbook. This should outline the

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school's standards for student behavior and the consequences for misbehavior.

- Make sure that teachers and other school officials have your contact information, and ask them to get in touch with you immediately if any problems arise.

- Make sure your child knows he or she can tell you anything about what's happening at school. Children who feel embarrassed or afraid to tell parents about threats from other students or similar concerns are more likely to reach a boiling point—making it more likely that they'll get into a physical altercation.

- If you find your child is the victim of bullying, talk with your child's teacher or principal immediately.

- Children with too much time on their hands can be tempted to misbehave in other ways. Help keep your child's attention focused on positive activities and encourage them to enroll in after-school programs or participate in athletic activities or student organizations that are school-sponsored. If these activities are not are not available, contact the YWCA, YMCA, Girls Club, Boys Club or other organizations that sponsor recreational and learning activities. A+

- As the school year progresses, monitor your child's attitudes and reactions to questions about school. If your child seems to evade questions about school, it could be a sign of a problem.

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UNDERSTANDING WHAT'S HAPPENING

- Talk with your child to understand the problem—what he or she is doing and why. Figuring out the root causes will help you address the situation. Traumatic situations such as divorce or adjusting to a new school may cause children to act out in ways they normally would not.

- Get all sides of the story. If your child's explanation of a behavioral incident differs significantly from the teacher's, work with both of them to understand what really happened.

- Speak to other parents who have children in your child's class. You may not be the only parent who is dealing with behavior issues.

- Who does your child hang out with at school? Learning more about the social group your child is a part of may help you understand what's happening.

- Consider all the reasons why your child may be misbehaving. Sometimes, a child who starts to dislike school or misbehave is doing so to mask a learning disability. Experts point out that a student may become the class clown "because it's better to be a behavior problem than it is to be perceived as a dummy." A+

- Check the school's student handbook to learn how serious forms of misbehavior are normally addressed. If your child is suspended or expelled

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from school, read the sections of the handbook dealing with suspensions and expulsions. Some serious offenses—such as bringing a weapon to school—are appropriate reasons for suspension or expulsion. But a more minor offense is usually handled through "progressive discipline," a system that increases disciplinary penalties with each incident of misbehavior.

- If you believe your child is receiving discriminatory treatment because of his or her race, national origin, gender or disability, you may file a complaint with the school system, most state departments of education, or the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. The NAACP and other organizations in your community may be able to help you.

- Some school districts have "alternative schools" or other facilities within their districts that are designed for students who chronically misbehave or threaten other students. If the school recommends transferring your child to such a facility, find out as much as you can about the facility. Alternative schools may function very differently from one district to another. Make sure your child will not simply be left in an environment without learning activities or proper supervision.

- If you have special concerns about a disciplinary issue, request a conference with your child's teacher or principal. If the meeting fails to address your concerns, talk to school district officials or with a school board member.

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your child & standardized tests

A new education reform law requires public schools to test its students much more frequently to measure student progress. Parents, teachers and others have a wide range of opinions on testing. The debate over testing centers on questions such as these: How much time should students spend taking tests? And how well do tests measure a child's knowledge or potential?

You may hear a school official or parent speaking of "high-stakes testing." This refers to tests that have something significant at stake—for example, a test that must be passed before the student can receive a high school diploma. Whatever you may think about tests, your child is likely to take at least one standardized test this school year.

Tests can help identify your child's strengths and weaknesses. As a parent, here are some things you can do to increase your understanding of the tests that are given and to help improve your child's performance on a standardized test.

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WHAT PARENTS CAN DO

- Ask the teacher about the major tests your child will take during the school year and what these tests are designed to measure. A school counselor may also have information on testing.

- Find out if the test results are meant to measure your child's individual performance or the performance of your child's school as a whole.

- Ask your child's teacher how much time is devoted to helping students prepare and practice for the test.

- Make sure that your child is present during both practice tests and the actual testing.

- Stay informed about your child's tests. Know how test results are used, and how they will affect your child's placement in school.

- Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep, especially the nights before they will be taking a major test.

- Remind your child to listen carefully to all of the test-taking directions that are given and to ask questions about any directions that aren't clear.

- Find out how your child has performed on the test and what impact these test results could have on your child's future.

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- Make sure you understand your child's test results. If necessary, ask a teacher or school official to help you interpret the results.

- If your child performed poorly on a test, your child may need a tutor, a remedial program or other assistance to improve or master reading, math or other skills. Ask your child's teacher what the two of you can do to help your child perform better on future tests.

- If your child was one of a large number of students at school who performed poorly on a test, it could be a sign that the school needs to review its curriculum, consider new teaching strategies and/or work more closely with parents. Ask the teacher or the principal what the school plans to do to help students improve their test scores. You may also want to talk to other parents to see if they share your concerns.

- If your child performed well on a test, praise his/her effort.

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THE ABC'S OF TESTING

Achievement tests
A standardized test that measures a student in specific academic subjects, such as math and reading. Often, achievement tests make it possible to compare students in different schools, school districts and states. Achievement tests measure a student's acquired learning, not his or her learning potential. A student's learning potential is usually measured by aptitude tests.

Aptitude test
A test that measures a student's overall knowledge and is often used to predict a student's learning potential.

Benchmark
A level of academic performance that is used as a "checkpoint" to monitor student progress in meeting specific academic standards.

Competency test
A test that measures a student's proficiency in major subject areas such as math and English. In some states, students are required to pass competency tests in order to graduate.

Composite
A test score that is the combination of scores from two or more smaller tests.

Core curriculum
Fundamental knowledge that all students are expected to learn in school.

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Intelligence quotient (IQ)
The score achieved on an intelligence test, which is sometimes used to gauge a student's learning potential.

Mastery
A level of achievement that demonstrates that a student has "mastered" the content being tested.

Mean
The average—the sum of all individual scores divided by the total number of scores.

Median
If tests scores were arranged from highest to lowest, the median would be the halfway point—the score that is exactly in the middle.

National percentile rank
This rank indicates how your child compares with other students in the same grade and within the particular group who took the test at the same time. Percentile ranks range from a low of 1 to a high of 99.

Norm-referenced tests
A standardized test that is designed to compare the scores of your child to scores achieved by children the same age who have already taken the same test.

Open-response questions
A type of question that requires students to generate, rather than recognize, a response. These questions require students to provide more in-depth responses.

Percentiles (percentile ranks)
Using a representative sample of test scores to indicate how well a student performed on

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a test. For example, a score at the 75th percentile indicates that 75% of students obtained that score or lower.

Portfolio assessment

A method in which teachers review many samples of a student's work, collected at different periods of time, as a way to measure a student's progress.

Raw score

A raw score is the number of questions answered correctly on a test or sub-test.

Standards

Statements, usually developed at the state level, that outline what students are expected to know and do in each grade and subject area. For example, a standard must declare that first-graders should know addition using numbers 1 through 20. Some tests are developed to measure if students are meeting standards that a state has established.

Standardized tests

Tests that are uniformly developed, administered, and scored.

Test bias

The difference in test scores that may be due to gender, race, ethnicity or other factors.

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overcoming social, economic and cultural barriers

When parents are involved in their children's education, research shows that children achieve at a higher level, attend class more regularly, and are less likely to drop out of school. Sometimes, social and cultural barriers make it difficult for African-American and Hispanic parents to get as involved as they might want to be. But there are actions you can take to help overcome these obstacles. Here are examples:

Barrier:
Some parents do not question or challenge figures of authority out of respect. Unfortunately, some teachers or school administrators may misread this reserved, non-assertive manner as a sign that minority parents are not interested in their children's education. This misperception sometimes creates a level of mistrust between parents and educators.

Action:
Many school districts have recognized this problem and are beginning to take steps to address it by training teachers and other staff to better understand the cultural

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norms of some minority parents. You can help to bridge this communication gap. Talk with your child's teacher as often as you can, even when things are going well. This will help build a positive working relationship.

Barrier:
Some parents have more than one job or work at non-traditional hours of the day or night.

Action:
Let your child's teacher know if your work schedule makes it difficult for you to participate in school activities. This will help the teacher recognize that you truly care, even if you can't personally attend many school events. Ask your child's school or teacher to schedule some activities so that more parents can be involved.

Barrier:
Some parents—especially single parents—don't have easy access to transportation or may not be able to find or afford a babysitter.

Action:
Explain your situation to your child's teacher or school officials. Some school districts have programs that send teachers and staff into neighborhoods to meet with parents. Your child's school system may already have such a program. Also, when transportation is a problem, consider car-pooling with other parents to a school

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event. If you can't meet with a teacher during school hours, consider sending a short note or an e-mail message to the teacher.

Barrier:
Historic practices of discrimination in the workplace, housing, voting and other areas have left many people of color with feelings of doubt and mistrust toward a variety of institutions such as schools and government.

Action:
Talk to other parents who live in your neighborhood, are members of the same community group or attend your house of worship. Look for people who are more involved in the public schools so you can find out how they got involved and learn about their experiences. These contacts can help you get in touch with school officials and ease your concerns.

Barrier:
Some parents either did not obtain a high-school diploma or did not have a positive school experience. This factor may discourage their involvement.

Action:
You are your child's first teacher. Regardless of your background, you know more about your child than your child's school. Getting involved and providing information to the teacher and other school staff can help them better understand how to teach and care for your child.

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DEALING WITH LANGUAGE BARRIERS

- More and more schools that serve large populations of Hispanic children are providing school bulletins and announcements in Spanish—or in other languages that are spoken by large numbers of parents in the community. If you receive school information in English that you cannot fully read or understand, ask if a version of the information is available in your native language or see if there is a staff member at the school who can help you translate passages you don't understand.

- Before a conference with a teacher or principal, request a translator or bring a family member who can translate for you. Understanding all that is being said during the conference is very important.

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school funding: a key to quality education

Many people are involved in educating your child—teachers, counselors, administrators, food service employees, librarians, office secretaries, school nurses, maintenance workers and many others. A lot of products and services are necessary to keep your child's school operating effectively—textbooks, electricity and other utilities, classroom supplies, building maintenance, testing materials and more. This all costs money.

WHERE DOES THE MONEY COME FROM?

There are three major sources for public school funding: local, state andfederal. While the federal government provides some funding, the overwhelming majority of funding comes from state and local sources. The percentage of state and local funding differs from state to state, and sometimes within the same state. For most school districts, only about 6 to 8 percent of funds come from the federal government.

State and local governments get funding for public schools through income taxes, property taxes, sales taxes, and other sources such as taxes on tobacco products or phone bills.

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Most federal funds for education go to targeted programs such as Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Title I is a provision of federal law that directs money to help students in high-poverty communities. Currently, Title I funds reach about one-third of all eligible children. The principal at your child's school should know if your school receives Title I funds.

IDEA, whose history began in 1975, targets funding to support the education of the millions of American children with physical, psychological or developmental disabilities. Recent changes in IDEA require regular reports on student progress and involve parents more deeply in decisions about their children's education.

Most Americans agree that school funding should be a top priority. In a recent poll, people were asked to name one or two priorities that government should protect from spending cuts. Education-named by 53 percent-was chosen more often than any other choice. In fact, all major segments of our population, including senior citizens and adults withoutchildren, support education funding over all other government spending priorities.

SOME DISTRICTS FACE TOUGH CHALLENGES

Most U.S. school districts rely heavily on local property taxes for funding. Poor communities that have low levels of property wealth are not able to raise as much money as wealthier communities.

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States have a responsibility to ensure that districts have the resources necessary to provide a high quality education. This presents a significant financial obstacle to many school districts, especially those in urban and rural areas where many people of color live.

Funding is a particular concern in several states in which state supreme courts have ordered officials to change school funding formulas. There are a variety of reasons why states are being asked to change their funding formulas, including concerns such as whether funding is equitable. The role that school vouchers play in diverting tax dollars from public schools is also a concern of many parents and educators.

HOW TO GET MORE INVOLVED

Get connected with other parents.

Every parent can make a difference by getting involved. But the impact of your involvement can be multiplied when you join other parents in monitoring and providing input on issues affecting your child's school. One way to do so is to join your local Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or the local branch of the NAACP.

Attend a school board meeting.

Your local school board makes crucial decisions about your child's learning. For example, your local school board generally

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has the authority to approve the school district's budget, choose the curriculum that is taught to students, adopt disciplinary policies, and decide other important issues. Listening to the discussion among school board members can give you a better idea of the issues that your school district faces. Many school board meetings set aside a specific period of time for parents and the public to share their ideas or concerns. Being informed may not require you to attend meetings in person. In many cities and communities, school board meetings are shown on a "public access" television station. Check with your school district or the cable TV operator in your community for the time that these meetings are shown.

Join other civic or advocacy groups.

In addition to parents' groups, there may be groups in your area that were organized to address specific concerns of schools or the communities they serve. Look for groups that share your concerns. Parents and others who live in many urban areas participate in local organizations that encourage positive reforms—these organizations are affiliated with the Public Education Network (PEN). Find out more by calling PEN at 202-628-7460. People For the American Way is another organization whose members are active in states and cities across the country.

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learning disabilities & special education

Former basketball star Magic Johnson has trouble reading and calls it "a lonely feeling." The famous physicist Albert Einstein struggled with mathematics. Actor Edward James Olmos and actress Whoopi Goldberg are among millions of people who have not allowed learning disabilities to prevent them from living successful lives.

If your child has a learning disability, he or she faces special challenges that can be overcome. Learning disabilities can make it harder to read or write, relate socially to a teacher or other students, remember or organize information, or perform other tasks.

Forty or 50 years ago, children with learning disabilities often did not receive the special assistance they needed. Children with learning disabilities are protected by a federal law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law guarantees your child a legal right to a "free and appropriate public education."

Millions of children have specific learning disabilities. Some of these disabilities are encountered right away, in kindergarten

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or first grade. Other problems may not show up until middle school or high school.

Children whose problems go undetected are more likely to assume they'll never catch up with other students and may give up on school. If you think your child may have a learning disability, it's important to identify it as soon as possible.

Ask school authorities to provide a comprehensive educational evaluation for your child. A comprehensive evaluation includes testing, interviews, reviews of your child's educational and medical history, and conferences with professionals who work with your child. Evaluations are designed to help identify areas of strength and difficulty for your child, and to help determine whether he or she is eligible for special assistance in school.

Evaluations can be arranged through the public school system (at no cost), or through private clinics or hospital clinics. Some school districts may not automatically accept test results from outside sources.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Be an advocate for your child by asking the teacher about the source of your child's learning difficulties. If you aren't satisfied with the explanation, don't be afraid to get a "second opinion."

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- Talk to people inside or outside of the school who have experience with children and learning problems. Your doctor may be able to suggest someone for you to talk to, and many large hospitals have developmental clinics that evaluate children's learning difficulties.

- Trust your instincts. Arrange to meet with a teacher or school official even if they haven't expressed any concerns. Parents are often in a position to detect a problem before the school identifies it.

- Remember that either you or the school can request an evaluation, but it can only be given to your child with your written permission. Be an active participant in the evaluation process. If you don't understand the process or the test results, ask questions.

- Help your child understand—as clearly as possible—the source of their difficulties. Sharing this information with your child helps to eliminate any confusion he or she may have and can improve your child's attitude.

- Find out as much as you can about the learning disability that your child faces. A school counselor or school psychologist may be a good source for information. Consider using the Internet or your public library to learn more.

- Let your child know that you view the learning disability as an challenge, not a roadblock. Your encouragement can keep your child on task and motivated.

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- Contact organizations or parental support groups in your area that deal with learning disabilities.
- Don't assume what your child's difficulty is until he or she receives a thorough evaluation by school officials. Learning disabilities aren't easy to identify and can be misidentified. Sometimes, well-intentioned people may draw the wrong conclusion about your child's difficulties.

What is an IEP?

Students with learning disabilities or health impairments qualify for special education programs. Special education teachers help to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each special education student. In fact, an IEP is required by federal law.

An IEP is a written document that sets personalized goals for each student and is tailored to a student's individual learning style and needs.

Teachers review the IEP with parents, school administrators and, often, with other teachers who teach or work with the student. If your child participates in a special education program, his or her teacher should work closely with you to inform you of your child's progress and suggest techniques to promote learning at home. The IEP should be reviewed periodically to make sure it addresses your child's current needs.

Special education teachers use various techniques to promote learning. Depending

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on the disability, teaching methods can include individualized instruction or working in small groups. When students need certain accommodations for test taking, special education teachers see that appropriate ones are provided. Examples of accommodations include having the test questions read aloud or lengthening the time provided for students to finish the test.

WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

Educators, parents and learning experts have a variety of views on assigning students to special education programs. Some of them believe that many children with learning disabilities aren't getting the special education services they need. Still others worry that some children may be diagnosed with the wrong learning disability or may not have a disability at all.

Parents should feel comfortable asking questions and insist on receiving as much information as possible. If a teacher or other staff member is not providing the information you've asked for, contact the principal at your child's school.

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undocumented students and their rights

In 1982, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that undocumented children and young adults have the same right to attend primary and secondary schools as do U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Like other children, undocumented students are required to attend school until they reach a certain age—usually 18. Based on the Supreme Court's decision, public schools cannot:

- Deny admissions to a student during initial enrollment or at any other time on the basis of immigration status.
- Treat a student in a different way to determine the residency status of the student's family.
- Engage in any practices that discourage or prevent a student from attending school.
- Require students or parents to disclose or document their immigration status.
- Ask questions of students or their parents with the goal of exposing their undocumented status.
- Require Social Security numbers from all students.

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ABOUT SOCIAL SECURITY

For identification purposes, students without Social Security numbers may be assigned a number generated by the school. Adults who do not have Social Security numbers and are applying for a free lunch and/or breakfast program on their children's behalf need only to indicate on the application that they do not have a Social Security number.

ABOUT YOUR PRIVACY RIGHTS

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and various state laws prohibit public schools from providing any outside agency—including the Immigration and Naturalization Service—with any information from a child's school that would reveal a child's undocumented status. The only exception to this Act is if a school first obtains permission from the student's parents. Parents are under no obligation to give permission.

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concerned? where to turn

Everyone has a limited schedule, so be prepared to explain your concerns or problems as briefly and clearly as you can. One way to help organize your thoughts is to write an explanation of your problem on paper. Here are the people, in order, that you should talk to (we've provided a space in the front to record their contact numbers):

1. Your child's teacher

2. The principal at your child's school

3. The superintendent's office

4. Your school board member

5. Someone at your state Department of Education

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WHAT NEXT?

If you've talked to the appropriate school officials but still feel your concerns are not being addressed, there are additional steps you can take. You may want to contact other organizations in your community or state, including:

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
Your local branch of the NAACP can answer questions and assist you in other ways. To find your closest NAACP branch, call 877-NAACP-98 or visit **www.naacp.org.**

National Council of La Raza
The NCLR represents and provides assistance to the Hispanic community on education, health care and other issues. For information on an NCLR affiliate in your state, call 202-785-1670 or visit **www.nclr.org**

National PTA
The PTA is a good place to connect with other parents. To find a PTA chapter in your area, call 800-307-4782 or visit **www.pta.org**

People For the American Way Foundation
PFAWF monitors and reports on school funding, class size and other educational issues. You can learn more about these issues by clicking on "public education" at PFAWF's web site, **www.pfaw.org**, or by calling the field department 202-467-4999.

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Other Resources

The NAACP and People For the American Way Foundation have joined with Eastman Kodak Company to launch a campaign to help parents get more involved in their children's public school education. Supported by the Advertising Council, the three partners are reaching out to parents. The campaign's web site offers tips on what parents can do-both at home and at school-to help make a difference in their children's education.

www.schoolsuccessinfo.org

UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUES

American Federation of Teachers
The AFT is one of the largest teacher's organizations in America. The organization is committed to improving public education, and is a good source for information on a variety of educational topics.
202-879-4400
www.aft.org

Civil Rights Project of Harvard University
This project examines discipline policies, bilingual education programs and the impact of race in education.
www.law.harvard.edu/groups/civilrights/

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Education Week
Each year the journal releases Quality Counts-a report examining public school programs. In 2002 the report examines efforts to strengthen public education, including how well states are providing the resources that schools need. Call or visit the web site to obtain a copy of the report.
1-800-346-1834
www.edweek.org/sreports/qc02/

National Black Caucus of State Legislators
The NBCSL brings together African-American legislators to study issues that are important to people of color. NBCSL has published "*Closing the Achievement Gap,*" which is available on the organization's web site.
202-624-5457
www.nbcsl.com

National Education Association
The NEA is America's oldest and largest organization committed to advancing the cause of public education-they can provide information on a range of issues, from preventing discrimination in school to enhancing teacher/parent communication.
202-833-4000
www.nea.org

Public Education Network
PEN helps to unite parents, community leaders and others in support of reforms that strengthen public schools. Call to locate the PEN affiliate in your area.
202-628-7460
www.publiceducation.org

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STANDARDIZED TESTS

Learning Network
This web site provides information on standardized tests. There's even a link that identifies the tests given to public school students in different states.
www.familyeducation.com

LEARNING DISABILITIES

The Attention Deficit Disorder Association
The ADDA provides information for parents and families about Attention Deficit Disorder.
847-432-ADDA (2332)
www.add.org

LD Online
This web site is filled with information on learning disabilities for both parents and teachers.
www.ldonline.org

National Council for Learning Disabilities
NCLD provides support for people with learning disabilities by offering information, resources and referral services.
888-575-7373
www.ncld.org

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CONCERNS ABOUT DISCRIMINATION

Equity Assistance Centers
Equity Assistance Centers work with parents and communities to offer training and other assistance to achieve educational equity in the areas of race, gender and national origin.
www.ed.gov/EdRes/EdFed/equity.html

Office for Civil Rights
If you feel your child is being discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, disability or national origin, contact the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education. OCR has a "Know Your Rights" section on its web site. 1-800-421-3481 (TDD: 1-877-521-2172).
www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/

YOUR CHILD'S HEALTH

For more information on how health issues can affect your child's ability to learn, go to: **http://www.schoolsuccessinfo.org/** and click on "download kit."

success in school = success in life

www.schoolsuccessinfo.org

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SOURCES FOR THIS PUBLICATION:

- U.S. Department of Education
- American School Counselor Association
- Learning Network
- Recruiting New Teachers
- SmarterKids.com
- The Wisconsin Education Association Council
- The Chicago Sun-Times
- National PTA
- National Center for Learning Disabilities
- National Education Association
- LD Online
- The American Federation of Teachers

success in school = success of life

For free internet access near you, contact:

www.connectNet.org (English)

www.Connectado.org (Spanish)

1-866-583-1234

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U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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